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above account represents a fairly typical description of hell which one often hears in the village community. Through conversation, folktale, myth and legend these ideas are implanted fairly early into the minds of the village children, who start life with a fear of sin. But by the time they reach the age of undertaking wild adventures these fears are diluted, and the gruesome accounts of hell no longer hold their spell of horror over them. As old age approaches, bitter memories of failures and frustrations accumulate and the flesh does not have the energy to undertake fresh adventures; people slowly begin turning their attention to thoughts of life after death. As an illiterate informant pithily put it: 'While youth lasts, passions rule the actions of man. While property lasts, the glitter of gold makes a man blind. But in old age, man laments for what he did in his youth. With his dim vision, he can no longer see the maddening glitter of gold. Then his thoughts turn to religion.'

The concept of *dharma* is also important, as it covers all the phases of the human life-cycle and fixes several details of intra- and inter-group life. *Dharma* has often been translated by Western writers as 'religion', but this translation hardly conveys the original meaning. It will perhaps be more appropriate to describe it as '*the* way of life' or 'that which is right'. Acceptance of caste traditions and the general rules of piety, observance of fasts and feasts, rigidly following the norms governing the *rites de passage* and undertaking pilgrimages to places of worship or for bathing in holy rivers, can generally be said to constitute the *dharma* of the people. Special worship and rituals may be performed to attain certain special ends. It is through *dharma* that one can look forward to shaping one's destiny. The concepts of *pap* (sin) and *punya* (merit), and of ritual pollution are fundamental to the wider concept of *dharma*. Certain things must not be done by any member of the community irrespective of his caste because they are sinful. Murder, extreme cruelty and violence, and incest can be placed under this category. There are certain other things which must not be done by certain castes, or by certain individuals in particular conditions. Sexual relations or inter-dining with a person of lower caste will lead to impurity. A woman in menses or a family immediately after childbirth and death remains in a state of ritual impurity for a specified period. After certain bodily excretions such as those of fæces, urine or semen, a prescribed